

Hartford Parent Organization Council

Milly Arciniegas
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Good Members of the Appropriation Committee:

My name is Milly Arciniegas and I am a parent and the Hartford Parent Organization Council president representing a coalition of 42 parent/teacher organizations throughout Hartford Public Schools.

I work with many Hispanic parents across Hartford and other towns throughout Connecticut to help them ensure not only their children are receiving the proper education, but also referring them to agencies to help them get food on the table, provide clothing for themselves and their children, health clinics, housing and the list goes on. Over the past couple of years I have noticed how parents who used to be able to provide for their families are now those families who are homeless, standing in lines at the food pantries and trying to access health care.

So, when the governor says that 25% of each Latino agency budget has to be cut, I simply don't understand and feel it is inhumane. Most of these agencies are already working from a very small budget to serve the neediest population. I myself have volunteered my IT services to these agencies and watched other parents volunteer as well despite their hardships.

I have seen agencies such as Brighter Futures take kids who had behavioral issues and turned them around to successful individuals who finish high school and pursue their higher education in college. I have seen families who received services at San Juan Speaking Center and San Juan Center find jobs, have access to health care and are ultimately able to provide for their families.

Now with this drastic cut, we will be going backward not forward.

We must look at another way. This is not the line item to cut away at yesterday or today, if anything we need to increase it.

Where will I send these families and what about the children? We talk a good game about closing the student achievement gap and when we are making some progress the first thing that happens is cutting away at us once again. This is why the children end up in jail and literally on the streets.

During this critical time right, the answer simply cannot be this one.

Thank you for your time.

Latino lawmakers oppose Rell's proposed funding cuts

By Ken Dixon, Connecticut Post Staff Writer

December 9, 2009

HARTFORD -- Latino lawmakers on Tuesday criticized Gov. M. Jodi Rell for proposing a 25 percent cut to important programs that help the minority group.

Led by Rep. Andres Ayala Jr., D-Bridgeport, the group said that Rell's proposed \$1 million reduction would affect youth and prenatal programs run by nonprofit groups that assist thousands of Connecticut residents.

During a news conference in the Capitol complex, House Majority Leader Denise W. Merrill, D-Mansfield, said she and other majority leaders will not support Rell's proposal when the General Assembly meets Dec. 15 to debate funding a deficit estimated at more than \$440 million in the current two-year budget.

"Unfortunately, we're dealing with the reality of a state budget that is constantly shrinking," Ayala said. "A state budget that, instead of looking to make additions to, we're making subtractions to."

Adam Liegeot, the governor's Capitol spokesman, said Tuesday that Connecticut is facing some hard choices. "The governor doesn't want to cut funding for any program, but the state faces a \$444 million budget deficit," he said. "If the advocates of these programs have any alternative spending cut proposals, we will be happy to review them."

Ayala said that in the two-year \$37.6 billion budget, \$1 million can be easily saved through "better efficiencies in government." He's aware of the tough decisions facing the Legislature, but current funding for Latino-based programming is less than 1 percent of the state budget.

"Now, when times are bad, that less than 1 percent is even more striking," he said. "It is mind-boggling. To be quite honest, it would be devastating."

Merrill said the funding is "critical" to Hispanics.

"I think sometimes the public thinks there are these cuts to things that we can make out there that aren't going to affect anyone," she said. "We've spent years nurturing some of these nonprofit agencies, particularly those that work in the cities, in these communities that do some of the most critical services in the state."

She said they deliver the service at low cost to those who need it the most. "To make a 25 percent cut to these kinds of services, where we have already cut to the bone, is just completely unthinkable, to my view. I know many people in my caucus feel the same way."

Merrill said that while the entire state economy is fragile, the recession is hitting minority

communities harder than most. "We cannot simply abandon them," Merrill said.

Carmen Sierra, executive director of CAUSA, the nonprofit Connecticut Association for United Spanish Action, said her 14-member organization, with offices throughout the state, including youth centers and community action groups, is already running budget deficits while trying to maintain services.

"We can't afford these cuts," Sierra said, charging that if the governor went into the communities, she would see the important work being done. "If they continue cutting the youth program, we're going to have more crime."

Statewide, according to the 2008 population estimate of the U.S. Census, 12 percent of the state's 3.5 million people are Latino or Hispanic.

"We're the largest minority group in the state of Connecticut," Ayala said. "Latinos contribute to the welfare of this state. They work hard, they contribute in income tax, they contribute in sales tax."